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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixtieth session

Summary record of the 1293rd meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 27 February 2015, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Hayashi

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Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Maldives

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Maldives (CEDAW/C/MDV/4-5, CEDAW/C/MDV/Q/4-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Maldives took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the 2008 Constitution of Maldives guaranteed the same rights and freedoms for both men and women and upheld the principles of non-discrimination and equality. The Government had pledged to focus in particular on the social, economic and political empowerment of women and to implement a policy of zero tolerance of violence against women.

3. Extensive work had been undertaken to improve the legislative framework protecting the rights of women, including the enactment of the Sexual Harassment and Abuse Prevention Act and the Sexual Offences Act. The new Penal Code, which comprehensively defined all crimes, including rape, would come into force in 2015.

4. Under the Constitution, the gender bar that had prevented women from standing for the Presidency had been removed. Consequently, Maldives had withdrawn its reservation to article 7 (a) of the Convention and the Government was working towards the partial withdrawal of its reservation to article 16 of the Convention.

5. A gender equality bill had been drawn up to transfer certain elements of the Convention into domestic legislation. The bill was designed to promote gender equality, prohibit gender discrimination, including gender-based violence, and ensure equal opportunities for boys and girls in education and training.

6. Gender focal points had been appointed in all ministries, departments and State-owned companies and were being trained in the use of gender mainstreaming tools in order to enable them to incorporate the Committee's concluding observations into their work. The Government had also been working with various partners to carry out gender diagnostic studies in areas such as social protection and employment.

7. Infant and maternal mortality rates had been reduced significantly over the past few years. Women had been granted the right to terminate pregnancies within 120 days of conception under certain circumstances, such as rape or incest.

8. Various awareness-raising programmes on family planning and reproductive health had been launched and health facilities had been set up on a number of islands and atolls to improve access to health care. Under the National Family Planning guidelines, all citizens had the right to family planning services.

9. Significant progress had been made in tackling the gender gap in education, with girls performing better than boys in primary and secondary education. More than half of the students currently in higher education were girls.

10. The Government had introduced flexible working hours and had made it easier for women with children under the age of 3 to work from home. Public officials had been granted the right to 60 days' maternity leave.

11. Following a recent amendment to the Corporate Governance Code, all registered companies were obliged to appoint a minimum of two women to their boards of directors.

12. Work was being carried out to enforce legislation on forced marriage. Maldives had ratified seven of the eight core international human rights treaties, including the Convention, and remained committed to ensuring gender equality and to protecting women's rights.

Articles 1 to 6

13. **Ms. Jahan** said that progress towards Millennium Development Goal 3 on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women was slow. She asked for updated information on the State party's plans to withdraw its reservation to article 16 of the Convention and on the cabinet discussion paper on that issue. More specifically, she asked whether the intention was partial or complete withdrawal of the reservation; she wondered whether there had been any multisectoral consultations, including with civil society, on the cabinet paper.

14. She said that women's rights were in no way contrary to the principles of Islam. Many Muslim countries had made sustained efforts to promote gender equality and had not maintained any reservations to article 16.

15. She expressed concern at the de facto gender discrimination which prevented women from fully enjoying the rights covered by the Convention. She asked how the Government reconciled articles 17 (a) of the Constitution, on the enjoyment of rights without discrimination, and 16 (a), restricting those same rights. Further legislative work should be carried out to ensure that the Constitution contained definitions of direct and indirect discrimination and to bring it into line with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention.

16. She asked for information on the definitions given in the gender equality bill and asked what measures would be taken to follow up the concluding observations of the Committee.

17. With regard to access to justice, there was a lack of gender-sensitive procedures and women were barred from appearing as witnesses in some circumstances. She asked whether steps had been taken to put in place a comprehensive awareness-raising programme on women's rights for prosecutors, lawyers and police officials.

18. **Ms. Haidar** asked for more information on the staff of the Ministry of Law and Gender and the share of the national budget allocated to the Ministry, and enquired how the Government assessed the impact of its gender mainstreaming policy and its Strategic Action Plan 2009–2013. She requested information on plans for the implementation of the gender equality bill and asked for an update on the legal proceedings initiated by the Supreme Court against the Human Rights Commission of Maldives: how did the Government intend to resolve that issue?

19. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that the cabinet paper on the withdrawal of the reservation to article 16 of the Convention would be discussed prior to its submission to the People's Majlis in March 2015. Civil society had been consulted on both the withdrawal of the reservation and the gender equality bill.

20. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that information on the share of the national budget allocated to the Ministry of Law and Gender would be provided later. The proceedings against the Human Rights Commission of Maldives had been initiated as the result of an administrative issue that had arisen when that body was compiling a report. Although the Government could not intervene in the judicial process, it was working with the Attorney General to ensure no similar cases arose in the future.

21. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that the Ministry of Law and Gender was responsible for all vulnerable groups, including children and women. Family and Child Service Centres had been set up on each atoll and qualified staff were being recruited to deal with victims of domestic and gender-based violence. A number of temporary shelters had also been set up.

both in the capital and on the atolls, to provide victims of domestic and gender-based violence with access to social workers and rehabilitation.

22. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the Government would continue to raise awareness of gender issues and the empowerment of women among judicial officials, parliamentarians and other stakeholders.

23. **Ms. Haidar** again expressed her concern at the legal proceedings initiated against the Human Rights Commission of Maldives and said it was important to ensure that national human rights institutions could carry out their work on an independent basis and without fear of reprisals.

24. **Ms. Jahan** asked what measures had been taken to improve the visibility of the Convention and the Optional Protocol and to increase the capacity of judicial and police officials to ensure that women had access to justice. Laws that might look gender-neutral were often implemented in a manner that discriminated against women, one example being the legislation providing for flogging in cases of "fornication", and she asked how the State party ensured that no discrepancies arose in such cases, in terms of equal treatment of men and women. She asked whether there was an established system under which the Human Rights Commission was automatically consulted on new legislation on human rights and women's rights and whether there were any legislative safeguards in place to protect and promote the rights of women members of religious minorities.

25. **Ms. Patten** asked what was being done to speed up the process of bringing domestic legislation into line with the Convention and whether the Government had considered carrying out a gender impact analysis of existing legislation with a view to amending provisions that discriminated against women.

26. As to access to justice, she asked whether the Government had established a link between a lack of gender awareness among judicial officials and the low number of women in the judiciary. Were there any plans to revisit the recommendations on judicial reform contained in existing reports, particularly those recommendations designed to eliminate discriminatory practices against women?

27. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the proceedings against the Human Rights Commission of Maldives did not constitute reprisals. She said that she would provide written clarification of the case within 48 hours.

28. Many aspects of the Convention would be integrated into domestic legislation through the adoption of the gender equality bill and work was being undertaken to review all laws in the light of the Convention.

29. Migrant workers members of religious minorities had the right to practise their religions in private. All citizens had full access to justice, there were courts on all the islands and there were awareness-raising and training programmes for police and judicial officials on access to justice for women. An increasing number of women were turning to the courts to resolve a variety of issues.

30. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that the previous concluding observations of the Committee had been disseminated; training programmes had been run for officials on the obligations arising from the Convention; and all training and awareness-raising programmes for women's development committees, local authorities and the general public carried out on the atolls contained a component on the Convention.

31. **Ms. Haidar**, referring to a previous unsuccessful attempt by the Government to introduce a quota for women in the legislature (CEDAW/C/MDV/CO/3, para. 15), asked what the Government intended to do to implement legislation in that regard.

32. As to plans to increase the number of women on the boards of directors of public companies, she asked which body would monitor progress in that regard and whether penalties would be imposed in the event of failure to reach the target.

33. She asked whether there were plans to introduce temporary special measures to meet the needs of women living on outlying islands and atolls.

34. **Ms. Gabr** said that, while she welcomed the State party's efforts to encourage women to take leadership positions, she remained concerned about the persistence of negative gender stereotyping, which could lead to discriminatory actions and attitudes. She requested information on the efforts made to remove gender stereotyping from school textbooks and asked whether there were any media campaigns to address entrenched stereotypes. She noted with concern that more women than men tended to be sentenced to flogging. She asked whether flogging, which was a violation of human rights, was still permitted under the new Criminal Code. She wondered what penalties were imposed on the perpetrators of female genital mutilation. She asked how harassment of women, in particular activists, was prevented, and what measures were in place to prevent violence against women migrants. Lastly, she requested information on the implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention National Strategy (2014–2016).

35. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that the Committee had been informed that, if found by the authorities, victims of trafficking who were exploited in prostitution and domestic work would be deported. She wished to know what procedures, interventions and services were available to victims when they were apprehended. She asked whether the tourist board was involved in efforts to counter trafficking and ensure compliance with the World Tourism Organization's Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. She asked what measures were in place to address internal trafficking, and whether any timeline was envisaged for ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol).

36. **Ms. Leinarte** said that, although there had been no official reports of commercial sexual exploitation of children in tourism in Maldives, the Committee had been informed that young girls were often offered material recompense, such as mobile telephones, in exchange for entertainment services in the tourism sector. She asked what measures were taken by schoolteachers and other educators to recognize the early signs of drug use and of girls being pushed into prostitution. She wondered whether any measures were foreseen to bridge the gaps in the Child Sex Abuse Act (2009), notably the fact that a person who was legally married to a minor under Islamic sharia would not be criminally liable for any offences under the Act, including child prostitution. She asked what was being done to protect immigrant women against being forced into prostitution, what services were available to help those who wanted to leave prostitution, whether there were any rehabilitation facilities, and what actions were taken once immigrant women who were involved in prostitution were confronted by the police.

37. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the Government was committed to achieving equal participation for women in politics. The education system and the media were used to dismantle gender stereotypes, as a result of which an increasing number of women were seeking employment in non-traditional areas, such as law, teaching, aviation and the judiciary. That said, growing religious conservatism and extremism were limiting the mobility and aspirations of younger women. Efforts were being made to counter those trends.

38. **Ms. Azza** (Maldives) said that the revision of the school curriculum had included a gender review of the curriculum as a whole and of individual textbooks. The new

curriculum had been rolled out in grades 1 to 3. All textbooks had been scrutinized from the perspective of gender sensitivity and the Government was confident that the new books did not include any gender stereotypes.

39. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the majority of migrant workers coming to Maldives were mostly men, or women seeking domestic work. The Government was committed to tackling trafficking and, owing to its efforts thus far, Maldives had been upgraded from tier 3 to tier 2 on the United States Department of State watch list. While there might be isolated cases of women and young girls being trafficked into Maldives for prostitution, there were other, more prevalent problems for female migrants, such as their conditions of work and rates of pay. Similarly, there were very few cases of young girls being exploited by the tourism industry.

40. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that the Ministry of Law and Gender had conducted a joint study with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The study had shown that only a small number of children were subject to commercial sexual exploitation, most of them from dysfunctional families and involved in drugs and gangs. While the figures were not alarming, the Government remained committed to addressing the problem.

41. Efforts were being made to reduce gender stereotyping, particularly by promoting women's participation in sports, such as football, that were traditionally dominated by men. Advocacy campaigns for gender equality were targeted at men as well as women, and a "he for she" training programme had been held to involve men in women's empowerment. Each year on International Women's Day awards were given to women who worked to counter gender stereotypes. A media campaign was under way to promote women's involvement in professions that were traditionally considered to be for men. The introduction of quotas for political participation had failed in the past, but a new cabinet paper on the issue was under consideration, setting a quota of 30 per cent for women in elected and appointed political posts. The engagement of political parties would be key to the success of that initiative.

42. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the question of child marriage was not an emerging issue in Maldives: women tended to marry in their early to mid-twenties.

43. **Ms. Jennifar** (Maldives) said that, with regard to drug use and prostitution, NGOs were conducting targeted interventions with key populations. Health-care personnel were being trained to identify risk groups and conduct behavioural change interventions. Services included voluntary HIV testing and counselling, access to prevention, drop-in centres and outreach services. There were also targeted peer outreach activities monitored by the Ministry of Health. While there were no official reports on the number of cases, the Government was committed to addressing female genital mutilation. Efforts were being made to address misconceptions through awareness-raising measures in communities.

44. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that temporary special measures for vulnerable groups, including quotas for participation in public life, would be set in line with legislation on gender equality.

45. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that measures were being taken to ensure that women had an equal position to men in society and equal access to services, including health care and education. Affirmative action had been taken, including amending the Civil Service Act to enable young mothers to work flexible hours and to grant them the right to up to six months' paid maternity leave. Guidelines on day-care regulations had been drafted to guarantee high standards and enhance working mothers' confidence in the day-care system. The number of child marriages was small; the Family Court would decide whether to approve the marriage of a minor aged 16 or 17, based on a number of criteria, including whether the minor concerned had earned a school leaver's certificate.

46. **Ms. Haidar** said that, while the measures taken to ensure flexible working hours and maternity leave for women were commendable, she wished to know how those flexible working hours were monitored, whether any day care was available for the children of working mothers and what guarantees were in place to ensure that mothers could return to work without being penalized. She also asked whether the State party was considering making any provisions for paternity leave.

47. **Ms. Gabr** asked whether flogging was still a form of punishment provided for under the Criminal Code. She asked how many shelters were available for women victims of violence, and whether those shelters were well equipped and adequately staffed.

48. **Ms. Gbedemah** asked whether migrant women found working in brothels were deported, and if so, how those deportations were handled, and in particular whether the staff involved received specific training. She also wished to know whether the profiles of sending countries were considered before migrants were deported. According to the Committee's information, victims of trafficking and domestic violence were housed in the same shelters. She asked whether there were any plans to provide separate facilities for them. Although the number of children involved in prostitution was low, vigilance was essential.

49. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that, while she understood the Committee's concerns regarding flogging and acknowledged that women were more often subjected to it than men, it had been retained in the new Criminal Code. Finding resources and equipment for the five safe houses and shelters was a challenge. Progress had been made with regard to measures to prevent domestic violence. Comprehensive legislation had been enacted in 2012, and training for officials involved in domestic violence cases was ongoing, in order to guarantee maximum support for victims. Parliament was currently considering ratification of the Palermo Protocol and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Research would be conducted to ensure a better understanding of the phenomenon of child prostitution.

50. Progress had been made regarding maternity leave, which amounted to 60 working days, and on flexible working hours. Consideration would be given to increasing the period of paternity leave allowed, since the experience of working women showed that an increasing number of men were taking family and childcare responsibilities. Despite the improvement in day-care facilities, women's return to work after maternity leave remained a challenge.

51. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that efforts were being made to obtain support from women's development committees to assist victims of violence and trafficking who sought refuge in safe houses. A memorandum of understanding had been concluded between the Ministry of Law and Gender and the women's development committees. The Department of Gender and Family Protection Services was conducting public awareness-raising programmes for the prevention of domestic violence.

52. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the revised national action plan on trafficking provided for shelter for male and female victims. Although space in shelters was limited, there were plans to ensure adequate space with separate facilities for men and women.

53. **Ms. Haidar** said that the Committee had received information regarding difficulties in guaranteeing fair trials. She asked what was being done to rectify that problem, since a lack of trust in the judicial system would have serious repercussions for Maldives with regard to its efforts to uphold its international obligations. She would appreciate information on the composition of the Judicial Services Commission.

54. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that the efforts made to train the judiciary on the Government's obligations under international law were often undermined by politicization.

The Government remained committed to modernizing and improving the judicial system, despite the challenges in that regard.

55. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that measures were being taken to educate judges and prosecutors about new legislation on domestic violence to ensure effective prosecutions. Further efforts were still required, however, to guarantee justice for victims.

56. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that cases had been prosecuted under the Domestic Violence Act, showing that there was access to justice, despite the challenges, and it was hoped that an increasing number of women would seek justice. The Government was committed to upholding women's rights, including in the event of divorce, and to that end, prenuptial agreements were being introduced.

57. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that, in order to mitigate the negative consequences of divorce for women, an amendment on equitable distribution of marital assets and property had been introduced into legislation on the family. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had assisted with the preparation of prenuptial agreements, to ensure better protection for women in the event of divorce.

Articles 7 to 9

58. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said she would be interested to hear more about women's participation in sectors other than politics. To judge from government data, no progress had been made in increasing women's participation in any State sector, and out of 14 diplomatic posts, only 3 were held by women. Progress could only be made when a clear and consistent policy was put in place to promote women's participation, which was the bedrock of substantive equality. The women's development committees received no funding and the women involved worked without remuneration. Their decisions did not have an impact on development programmes and the committees therefore appeared to be a waste of women's expertise. She asked why there were no mechanisms in place to ensure their work was effective. Historically, women in the Maldives were subordinate to men. That stereotype was set in infancy and continued throughout women's lives. Women would not take up roles in the public sphere if that stereotype remained ingrained. She asked what strategy was in place to rectify the situation. She also wondered whether, if a quota system was introduced for participation in politics, it would be in place in time to impact on the next elections in 2016.

59. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao expressed concern regarding legislation on nationality, according to which children born out of wedlock to mothers who were not citizens of Maldives were not entitled to Maldives citizenship, even if the father was a Maldives citizen. She wondered how many children were affected. Did the Government intend to amend that provision and take measures to discourage the stigma and discrimination — particularly with regard to access to welfare services — surrounding children born out of wedlock?

60. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that women's underrepresentation in politics and the labour force should not be classified as a systematic violation of their rights. The main causes were stereotypical cultural and social attitudes and practical obstacles such as access to childcare and family responsibilities. However, the Government believed that underlying trends were positive, especially at the parliamentary, judicial and administrative level. Women accounted for a growing number of judges and lawyers and, while there were still too few female parliamentarians, more and more women were standing for office. The possibility of using quotas to increase their chances of electoral success would be considered.

61. As the first female Minister of Foreign Affairs, she was committed to bringing more women into senior diplomatic positions despite the obstacles they faced. There were

already numerous female ambassadors and heads of mission and women far outnumbered men overall.

62. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that women accounted for 45 per cent of the labour force and over half of the nation's civil servants. The majority of working women were employed either in the informal sector or in traditionally female positions in health and education. However, the State's highly active female-led NGO sector was working to promote women in employment and NGOs were regularly consulted about policy and programme development.

63. There were 104 functioning Island Women's Development Committees but their efficacy was impeded by lack of funds and capacity. To reverse that situation, the Ministry of Law and Gender planned to run capacity-building programmes on four atolls in 2015, and the authorities intended to return to the development committees the assets accumulated by the former structures, which had been dismantled in 2008. The aim for the future was that the development committees should have an active and central role in island development, as they had done in the past, when they had been involved in fund raising and running preschools, inter alia. Legislation might be amended to empower them to that end.

64. Proposals for a quota-based approach to candidate selection and the establishment of a pool of qualified women eligible for political posts were currently on the table. Leadership programmes were being run for potential women candidates with support from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and other international organizations. Longer-term objectives included the setting aside of seats for elected and appointed posts, a review of civil service human resources policy, and affirmative action to prevent the penalization of women who took career breaks for family reasons. A minimum quota of 30 per cent for women judges was also proposed.

65. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that women were the driving force of the social development work being done in the NGO sector and were also very active in grass-roots politics. It was hoped that quotas, more affordable childcare and other affirmative action measures would contribute to similar levels of participation at all levels.

66. Women had had the right to pass on their nationality to their children since the enactment of the 1997 Constitution. The authorities were aware that the nationality rights of children born out of wedlock to foreign mothers and Maldivian fathers might be compromised, and were working to address the problem.

67. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she would like information about women's role in disaster planning and climate change management, and about the measures being used to enhance women's representation in the diplomatic service and in international forums in which decisions affecting women were made. She would also like to know why there were still no women atoll chiefs, and to what extent the recommendations made in the UNDP Baseline Human Rights Survey had been acted upon.

68. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that a bill on the Foreign Service that would define roles and responsibilities and enhance professionalism was expected to be passed shortly.

69. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that women were represented on atoll councils and that some island councils were headed by women. Thus, although the Island Women's Development Committees were not fully functional at present, women made active contributions to local community development.

70. **Ms. Jennifar** (Maldives) said that the Government had adopted a strategic national action plan for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation for 2010 to 2020.

Articles 10 to 14

71. **Ms. Bailey** said she was concerned that the overall school enrolment figures might mask underlying discrepancies. Reports suggested that conservative attitudes towards girls in education, which were particularly prevalent in the atolls, might be restricting the attendance of girls, even if they were officially enrolled. Attendance as well as enrolment figures were therefore needed, as well as details of action being taken to counteract traditional views that placed girls at a disadvantage to boys.

72. She was likewise concerned about reports that teenage girls who became pregnant as a result of consensual sex were not permitted to return to school and were treated as juvenile offenders, while social stigma also effectively excluded girls who became pregnant as a result of abuse, even though they were theoretically permitted to return. She would like to know the prevalence of pregnancy among school-age girls; whether there was a clear procedural framework to facilitate their return to education; and whether sexual and reproductive health education was included in the curriculum. Clarification regarding the content of paragraph 149 of the periodic report, which suggested that information on reproductive health was being removed from textbooks, would be appreciated. Lastly, she asked what was being done to attract more girls into scientific and technical areas of study.

73. **Ms. Patten** asked whether any cases of discrimination had been brought before the Employment Tribunal under the 2008 Employment Act; whether there was a labour inspectorate to monitor the Act's implementation, especially in the private sector; and what training officers of the Employment Tribunal received. She would like to know what protection was available to the growing number of migrant women who worked in Maldives, often illegally, on low pay, without adequate health insurance and for unreasonably long hours; whether employment law accorded those women the same rights as other workers; whether working hours, wages and leave entitlements in occupations dominated by women migrant workers were expressly monitored and protected, and if so what monitoring mechanisms were used; and whether ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was being considered.

74. Citing reports that employment in the tourism sector was generally insecure, unregulated and subject to arbitrary conditions, she asked how the State party ensured that rural island women were not exploited in unskilled, unsafe work and, at the same time, that employers in the tourist industry were not deterred from hiring local women.

75. She would like to know what was being done to address the gender pay gap; whether the principle of equal pay for work of equal value was expressly established in the Employment Act; and whether penalties for non-compliance were established. Lastly, she asked whether there was a minimum wage applicable in the informal sector; whether the minimum wage was subject to regular increments; and whether the Government was considering introducing corporate and institutional codes of conduct.

76. **Ms. Zou** Xiaoqiao said that sexual, reproductive and other basic health services did not appear easily accessible in the atolls, due to a lack of adequately qualified staff, insufficient equipment and confidentiality issues which diminished women's trust in health-care facilities. Did the State party envisage allocating more financial and human resources to health care in the atolls and what was it doing to guarantee patient confidentiality?

77. She asked the State party to comment on reports of worrying levels of illegal and unsafe abortion, infanticide and child abandonment, which were associated with lack of sexual and reproductive knowledge, insufficient access to contraception and the stigma attached to out-of-wedlock pregnancies. She would welcome information about any plans to collect information about such pregnancies, to incorporate age-appropriate sex education in the core school curriculum and to increase contraceptive use among the nation's youth.

Lastly, she asked what support and prevention programmes were in place for girls and women exposed to trafficking in human beings, the illegal drug trade and prostitution, who were among the population groups most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

78. **Ms. Maumoon** (Maldives) said that school enrolment and completion rates were comparable for girls and boys at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels and that traditional attitudes did not impede girls' education. In fact, it was boys who were more likely to become disengaged, leading many to drop out early to take up fishing or other wage-earning activities. With regard to teenage pregnancies, especially in cases of sexual abuse, every effort was made to ensure that victims could return to school and resume a normal life. However, stigma could be hard to overcome and in some cases tuition was provided in safe houses or shelters. The life skills education curriculum was designed to ensure sexual and reproductive awareness and nurture responsible and safe behaviour among boys and girls alike.

79. **Ms. Azza** (Maldives) said that there was neither official nor anecdotal evidence of ideological barriers to girls' education and that attendance rates tended to be higher among girls than boys. There were no legal barriers to the continuing attendance of vulnerable children, although social barriers such as stigma and bullying could be deterrents. To provide for such children, the authorities had been developing an alternative learning programme in association with UNICEF. Other advances achieved in education included the introduction of a technology-based learning stream and the update of the life skills curriculum, following a gap analysis conducted with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

80. **Ms. Jennifar** (Maldives) said that the Government's general health strategy recognized the importance of sexual and reproductive health services in guaranteeing fundamental human rights. The reproductive health strategy 2014–2018 embraced the primary health-care approach and its five key elements, as advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO), and had five core components: family planning, maternal and newborn health, prevention of unsafe abortion, prevention and management of sexually transmitted diseases, and promotion of sexual health. Family planning services were available on all islands in almost 180 separate facilities, including 6 regional hospitals and 14 atoll hospitals. All medical officers had midwifery training and almost all facilities were manned by a fully qualified doctor.

81. The prevalence of unwanted pregnancy and illegal abortion had not been studied so official statistics were unavailable. Termination of pregnancy was permitted during the first trimester in cases of rape and incest and also when the health of the mother or child was at risk.

82. **Ms. Ali** (Maldives) said that the health-care authorities had been very successful in maintaining the confidentiality of HIV/AIDS cases in spite of the inherent difficulty of doing so in a small community. Media sensitization campaigns to increase understanding of HIV/AIDS and other conditions were ongoing, and training workshops on maintaining confidentiality had been organized for medical officers.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.